

Georgia EPD to Monitor Air Quality in Covington and Smyrna for Ethylene Oxide

August 16, 2019

The Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) is announcing today an air quality monitoring plan to measure ethylene oxide levels around two plants in suburban Atlanta. Sterigenics in Smyrna and BD in Covington use the gas to sterilize medical equipment.

The two facilities are located in census tracts identified by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as having potentially elevated lifetime cancer risks. The findings about elevated risks due to ethylene oxide were not due to new emission sources or increased emissions. Rather it was due to EPA's finding that the long-term exposure to the gas may be more harmful than previously thought.

Air samples will be collected at each site every six days over the next several months. Four monitoring locations for each community are being chosen ranging in distance from a quarter mile to a mile from the company property, both upwind and downwind. Equipment will be in the field within the next few weeks. A commercial laboratory will conduct the testing and results are expected in early November.

The EPD monitoring plan is focused on Smyrna and Covington, but the agency is also testing air in areas that are far from any permitted source of ethylene oxide. This is done for purposes of identifying baseline levels of air pollution in areas where there is no known source of ethylene oxide. EPD will use that information to get a better understanding of the facilities impact on air quality.

EPD has taken air samples at its South DeKalb Air Toxics Monitoring Station and has released results from the first sample. That sample identified levels of ethylene oxide associated with a higher lifetime cancer risk according to EPA's revised toxicity estimates. This initial result suggests the presence of ethylene oxide not associated with an industrial source and is consistent with findings in other states. EPD is working with EPA to better understand non-industrial sources of ethylene oxide and will continue to collect regular air samples at the south DeKalb site and begin monitoring at a rural south Georgia location far from any industry or traffic in addition to monitoring in Covington and Smyrna.

Community meetings and open houses are scheduled in Smyrna on August 19 and in Covington on August 20. Officials from EPA, Georgia EPD, Georgia Department of Public Health and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry will be at the meetings to answer questions and provide information. Click on these links for details on the meetings:

Smyrna – <https://www.epa.gov/smyrna-eto/forms/sterigenics-smyrna-facility-open-ho...>

Covington - <https://www.epa.gov/covington-eto/forms/becton-dickinson-covington-facil...>

Working with EPD, Sterigenics and BD have agreed to voluntarily take actions to further reduce emissions. Both facilities are operating in compliance with current requirements.

EPD keeps a significant amount of information about ethylene oxide and the facilities that use it on its website at <https://epd.georgia.gov/ethylene-oxide-information>.

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